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Christ is our peace



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*When there is peace
dwelling among us,
there can be hope of
building communities
of peace for all people
in the world*

Christmas symbolises peace and hope for humankind. The child born in Bethlehem brings peace to humanity. Christ, the babe in the manger, restores dignity to human beings and brings hope to those who are in despair. He has come to heal life's wounds and to restore human dignity.

The word 'peace' in the Bible is translated from the Hebrew word *shalom*. It means the absence of war and conflict and signifies the presence of harmony, reconciliation and justice. The New Testament, which uses the word *shalom* more than 100 times, tells about the peace Christ brings.

How does the message of peace and hope that Christmas brings resonate with the realities of the present-day world?

We live in a world of hate and destruction. Acts of terrorism are increasing day by day. The number people affected by HIV/AIDS is not decreasing. Poverty, unemployment, corruption and different forms of violence are creating havoc among individuals and communities.

Jesus was born to bring peace and justice to a world torn apart by wars and conflicts. The prince of peace came to demolish 'the dividing wall of hostility'. (Ephesians 2:14) He came to set the captive free and to liberate the oppressed from all unjust structures.

We need Christ's peace and hope in this world where people and nations are burdened with socioeconomic and political problems. We need the self-emptying love of Christ to bring about a society that is just and humane. We hope for a day when wars and terrorism will end and when peoples and nations will live in unity, justice and freedom.

Peace comes from the presence of God. Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.' (John 14:27) We as individuals and communities can promote peace when we are at peace with God and within ourselves. When there is such peace dwelling among us, there can be hope of building communities of peace for all people in the world, especially for those who are marginalised and broken.

It is customary to set up a manger in our homes at Christmas to celebrate the birth of Christ. But the real birth of Jesus should happen in our hearts and minds every day. This means being at peace with God, with oneself and with others. It means a conviction and commitment for building communities of peace.

May we rededicate ourselves during this Christmas to work toward building communities of peace, based on love, hope and justice.

Wishing you all a joyous and meaningful Christmas.

—Prawate Khid-arn



Ecumenical AIDS consultation

Leadership training for indigenous women in South Asia

Sharing more about Asian feminist theology



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Keep commitment, stop AIDS

Ecumenical AIDS consultation 2005

An Ecumenical AIDS Consultation 2005 (EAC 2005) was convened at the Bangkok Christian Guest House in Bangkok from 28 October to 1 November 2005. Fifty-nine representatives from Catholic, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran churches in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Thailand reflected on the 'religious leaders' commitment' presented to the 15th International AIDS Conference (Bangkok Conference) in 2004. The meeting was also searching for the proactive participation of religious communities in combating HIV and AIDS in the years ahead.

'HIV/AIDS is no longer something we can assign to someone else to sort out. To run away would be to deny responsibility in the face of

injustice and sufferings,' Dr Prawate Khid-arn, CCA general secretary, said in his keynote address.

He added, 'In line with our distinct Christian experience and divine teachings, our efforts must be tuned towards fostering hope of a new life and dignity for those who are being socially excluded, or discriminated against, simply because they are HIV-positive and AIDS patients. This challenge points directly to how the church understands its mission as a prophetic and healing community.'

Fr Dr T.M. Joseph of St Stephen's College, India, led the biblical reflection, taken from Mark 5:25-34. He challenged the churches to bring back basic human dignity and human rights, giving opportunity to the people who are discriminated and rejected. Mohammed Alibhuiyan of UNAIDS presented various ways and strategies for religious



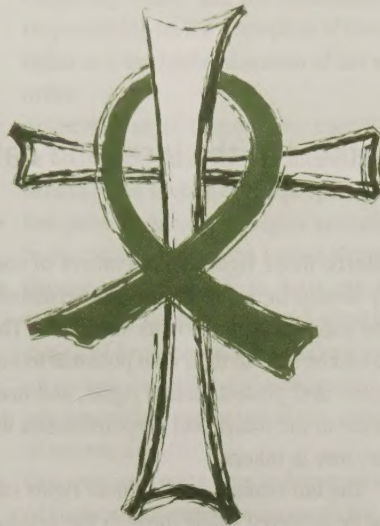
leaders and communities to combat the virus:

- Strong leadership commitment.
- Preventing HIV among young people.
- Comprehensive HIV/AIDS programming (awareness raising, prevention services, treatment and care and impact mitigation) among sex workers, drug users and other vulnerable populations, including mobile populations.
- Capacity building for increasing access to HIV treatment, care and support.
- Reducing stigma and discrimination.
- Advocacy and gender as crosscutting themes.
- Intercountry collaboration, with focus on transborder mobility.
- Partnership with civil societies (NGOs, CBOs, FBOs) and the private sector.
- Generating adequate strategic information.

Greg Gray of the Asia Pacific Network of people living with HIV/AIDS (ANP+) and his colleague shared the struggle of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). Among other comments, he emphasised that 'PLWHA organisations need to develop meaningful partnerships with other stakeholders to advocate for the rights of PLWHA.'

World AIDS Day 1st December 2005

**STOP AIDS:
KEEP THE PROMISE**



*A liturgy to be used in places of
worship around the world*

The meeting recommended various follow-up plans of action for churches:

- Including HIV/AIDS in the annual plan of the churches.
- Including HIV/AIDS in the Sunday school curriculum.
- Providing sexual education to teenagers.
- Supporting PLWHA groups.
- Observing the memorial day for people who have died of HIV/AIDS and World AIDS Day (1 December) and also World AIDS Sunday.
- Incorporating HIV/AIDS messages in international events such as Women's Day and Children's Day (1 April).
- Strengthening networking of parishes/churches.
- Providing home-based care for people with HIV/AIDS.
- Running trainings for church leaders, such as bishops, clergy etc.
- More proactive participation in ICAAP (International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific)

in 2007 in Sri Lanka. Closer coordination with AINA (Asian Interfaith network on HIV and AID) could strengthen this initiative. Local committees should be formed and begin preparations. The preparatory workshop on HIV and AIDS and for ICAAP 2007 will be held early next year.



Ninth annual human rights training

Building a culture of respect for others at the local and national levels

Human rights can be broadly defined as the moral entitlement of all human beings to a dignified life and full development of their personality and social justice. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Although there may be distinction among people as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, politics and other opinions, there can be no such distinction in the entitlements with regard to human rights. These rights are inalienable. Therefore, the term 'human being' can be used to represent any person who belongs to any category of society.

The protection of human rights depends on people knowing about the rights they are entitled to, and the mechanisms available to

enforce those rights. All members of society should be made aware of international and national human rights standards. They should be alert to their own potential to both violate and protect human rights, and made aware of the duties and responsibilities that they owe to others.

The full realisation of human rights cannot be achieved solely through the development of law and the establishment of mechanisms to implement that law. Promotion of human rights means working towards the development of a culture of respect for and observance of human rights at the national and local levels.

CCA has striven to build such a culture by providing pastors, church workers and

lay leaders with training on human rights. Its ninth annual human rights training program was held 10–16 November 2005 at the Sopo Topa Hotel, Samosir Island, North Sumatra, Indonesia, hosted by the HKBP, the largest church in Indonesia, with delegates from Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.

The training began with an opening worship, which highlighted the reality of Asia and the needs, expectations and inspirations of its people, led by Tony Waworuntu, executive secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service of CCA. The program orientation that followed mainly



focused on the objectives—to provide opportunities for pastors/church workers and lay leaders to study human rights concepts from a Christian perspective, to analyse the emerging human rights trends in Asia and to equip the participants with updated knowledge and skills in dealing with human rights issues. Also included was the promotion of the concept of human rights, the ecumenical movement's involvement in upholding human dignity initiatives, advocacy on human rights and elimination of all forms of inhumanity.

Greetings were brought from local government officers of Samosir Island (Mr K. Siboro), the North Tapanuli Regency (Drs Melani Butarbutar) and the General Secretary of the HKBP (Rev. W.T.P. Simarmata).

The training was designed to include biblical and theological reflection on human rights according to both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the human rights situation in Asia, a historical background on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its implementation and UN mechanisms and instruments on human rights.

There were group discussions in order to make the training more effective and finally the presentation of national reports on the human rights situation in each country of Asia.

The biblical and theological reflection on Human Rights was led by Dr Tso Man King from Hong Kong. The human rights situation in Asia was led by Ms Kim Soo A from the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), based in Hong Kong. The historical background on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its implementation and UN's mechanisms and instruments on human rights were led by Ms Mandy Tibbey from Australia.

The training sessions were mainly focused on the following:

- Visualisation of the biblical scriptures and their impacts on the personal lives of each and everyone.
- Extension of God's nature, our responsibility and accountability to God, equality among human beings, God's faithfulness and our stewardship on God's creation.
- Transformation of human rights advocacy

as an international agenda and God's expectations from human beings and our commitment towards the creation and the Creator.

- The reality of human rights in Asia, the violations, states' and the communities' responsibility on the protection of human rights and the implementation of law and order.
- Achievement of democracy, sacrifices in achieving such and the necessity of breaking the silence of the people.
- Religious freedom and rights according to the conventions of the United Nations.
- Human rights appeals to the Asian Human Rights Commission, and ways and means of bringing international pressure on various countries of violations and the pre-protection measures of the sources of information.
- Our own understanding and perceptions of justice, the consequences of the involvement against injustice and the transformation of human relationship.
- The historical background and the global development of human rights, such as agreements between parties, and people's uprising against ruling parties.
- The guidance of the development of international human rights laws from the feminist movements all around the world.
- The development of provisions in the UDHR and the new emphasis on the conventions.
- The structure of the UN with regard to indigenous people, the partners of the UN Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, Subcommission on Promotion and Protection on Human Rights, and working groups on indigenous populations.
- The ways of supporting human rights advocacy, the implementation of the human rights treaties at the local level, UN systems of human rights protection and the role of UN High Commissioner.

The participants were divided into five groups and the groups were assigned various topics for a more effective participation. The discussions were on the following:

- Case identification, such as identifying the victim, identifying the perpetrators, the

date and venue of the incidents and the nature of the case.

- Relating the UDHR to home and family, the church, the community, in education, in the workplace and in terms of the government or police and initiatives taken to address the issues.
 - Conventions on the rights of the child and against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- The sharing of the national reports elaborated most of the issues and the challenges faced. The following is an overview:
- Constructional aspects of human rights, the impacts of the open economy and globalisation, violations of religious, women's and child rights.
 - Political violence, limited press freedom and trafficking of women and children.
 - Domestic violence, abuses of power, corruption, migrant workers and the situation of democracy.
 - Marginalisation, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and the unethical intervention of foreign troops.
 - Military dictatorship and terrorism.
 - Child labour, child marriages, sex slavery, violence due to illiteracy, gender discrimination, arbitrary arrests and detention of political opponents.

Suggestions for alleviating these concerns included community organisation, church initiatives, critical education, participatory involvement irrespective of all divisions, strengthening civil society, effective and substitute policies, reconciliation between communities and amendments to regulations.

Conflict, violence, social injustice and other risks affect the lives of people in most countries of the region. The high rate of incidents of violence, through ethnic conflict and organised crimes throughout the region increases the vulnerability of citizens' human rights.

There remains the need for human rights education, advocacy, the participatory involvement of civil society and the sharing of information at the local and national levels. Uplifting these needs would be the most effective way of promoting and protecting human rights and human dignity in society.

—Tony Waworuntu

Empowerment

Alternative leadership training for transformation among indigenous and dalit women of South Asia

We affirm the rights of all peoples
To life, cultural expression,
To education, health, employment,
To prosperity and security,
To participation in decision making
and self-government.

We affirm the rights of women to
chart their own destiny,
To be liberated from the burdens of
gender, class, and race (and caste),
To participate in the creation
of a just, sustainable and
peaceful society free from racial
discrimination.

—Asian Women's Declaration
Against Racism, Hsinchu, 2000

Shillong, which derived its name from 'Leishyllong', meaning a superpower or the god who is believed to reside on the Shillong Peak, was an appropriate place for the gathering of 28 women for the first subregional training of Indigenous/Dalit Women's Alternative Leadership for Transformation (IWALT) in northeast India.

IWALT is a three-year project of empowerment program for dalit/indigenous/ethnic/aboriginal women in the church, initiated at the subregional level, and sustained at the national level, to analyse the root causes of violence, racism, casteism, sexism, classism and the impact of globalisation. The study is a search for alternatives drawn from their faith and cultural heritage towards overcoming the institutionalised violence that continues to trap women in marginalised and difficult lives. The ecumenical movement continues to work for a common witness of

service for fullness of life. CCA at present is focusing on the theme 'Building Communities of Peace for All', thus capability building of dalit/indigenous/tribal/aboriginal/ethnic women for leadership and participation in church and society is a priority, in partnership with the WCC.

The National Council of Churches in India, the Presbyterian Church in India and the John Roberts Theological Seminary hosted this event on 12–20 September 2005 at the PCI Assembly Centre, Shillong, Meghalaya, Northeast India.

The training aimed at helping the indigenous/tribal/dalit women to:

- gain analytical and methodological tools to deal with Bible reading from dalit and indigenous women's point of view,
- gain skills in methods to implement the

learned experience into their own local communities (multiplying effect),

- gain instruments of analysis and theological reflection to be able to interconnect and interrelate the categories of race/ethnicity, gender, class and globalisation,
- revive this perspective in the life of the churches,
- draw from cultural heritage and Asian spirituality ways of addressing violence and cultivating a culture of peace.

The team of resource persons/facilitators included Limala Longkumer, Sagarika Chetty, Awala Ao, Hope Antone, Anna May Chain, Marilia Schuller and Corazon Tabing-Reyes.

Dr Limala Longkumer, in her paper on 'Indigenous Women's Context and Impact of Globalisation: Challenges for Transformation', wrote, 'Both patriarchal and mat-



Caption

rilineal systems have existed in the tribal societies of northeast India. The majority of the tribes has a patriarchal culture, while the Khasi-Jaintas and Garos follow the matrilineal system of descent.' However she stated that women in both systems share the same subordinate plight. Almost 80 per cent of the tribals are Christians but 'tribal women in northeast India occupy an extremely disadvantaged position in society and church' as the village administrative system is carried on in the church as well.

She then discussed the negative economic, social, cultural and ecological impacts of globalisation on tribal women. In the light of new threatening realities of legalised domestic migrant workers, prostitution, sex trafficking, increased rate of rape cases, high rate of people with HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence in conflict areas, she identified the following challenges for transformation:

- women's empowerment through education, leadership development and organisation,
- rediscovering indigenous communitarian values for life and positive cultural traditions,
- the practice of sustainable agriculture,
- promoting health education,
- promoting spirituality of interrelatedness of all creation.

Like the indigenous women, the women dalits of India, according to Sagarika Chetty, suffer from being social outcasts and being women, whose poverty is exacerbated by globalisation. Hope Antone presented the framework of Asian feminist/women theologising, 'building on the blocks of the previous sessions and putting these blocks together in a creative design' and adding more in an interactive way. She said, 'We have named this framework "Asian Feminist Theologising", for it springs from our multiple contexts in Asia (thus, Asian), it consists of a political commitment to ensure the equality of women and men (thus, feminist) and it includes reflection on faith in the light of our lived realities (thus, theology).'

After engaging participants in word association, she said, 'Feminist and feminism connote much more than simply being femi-

nine. Whereas being feminine usually refers to the gender stereotyping of women to be soft, quiet, gentle, prim and proper, feminism is a movement for the promotion of equality in dignity of women and men as having been created in the image of God.'

She compared her proposed framework with the other frameworks of traditional/classical vs. contextual framework and the feminist vs. Asian feminist theologising framework. She then went into deepening the analysis of sexism, classism, casteism, racism and religious/denominational chauvinism/fundamentalism.

Dr Anna May Chain led in the sessions on 'Feminist Reading of the Bible' with three objectives—to enable the reading of the Bible with women's eyes, to seek the relevancy of the Bible for indigenous/dalit women's issues and to write Bible studies from their context. In her brief introduction, she talked about the Bible as growing out of a patriarchal culture. It is culture-bound, where father is the head and everybody follows the father. The woman is controlled by the father, then by the husband, and then by the son. The Bible is male dominated and male centred. Of a total of 1,426 names in the Bible, 1,315 are men's and 111 are women's (only 9 per cent). She then outlined guiding principles—when women read the Bible through women's experiences and eyes, using their own cultural/historical resources, from the underside, holistically, for transformation—reading the Bible must challenge us to do something about ourselves and about where we are.

The ensuing sessions were Bible studies and articulations on gender ('Because of Eve: Reading Genesis 2 and 3 from Feminist Perspectives' and 'Militarism and Violence against Women: A Study of Judges 19–21),

gender, class and ethnicity ('Human Dignity in the Book of Ruth', 'The Syrophoenician Woman' (Mark 7:24–30) and 'The Samaritan Woman' (John 4:1–30)) and power ('Women Liberators of the Exodus Story (Exodus 1:1–2:10) and 'Miriam: Leader Extraordinaire' (Numbers 12)).

Anna May used the creative methodology of storytelling, dramatisation, small-group discussion and group creative presentation aside from her full report. She encouraged the participants to write poems, compose songs and make drawings, comics or cartoons. Each small-group discussion was guided with provided questions and followed by reporting to the whole group for enrichment. She wove her input for each Bible study within these creative methodologies. Her papers were in the kit for each one's reading and enrichment of background but she did not rely on these papers for her group sessions.

Each day's session was like weaving parts of a tapestry. Every day started with the meditative exercise of shibashi and morning prayer led by participants and ended with evening prayer or ritual to close the day before dinner. In between sessions were energisers to keep the energy of participants high. They had time to worship with the churches and be with the John Roberts Seminary for building ecumenical relationships with WCC and CCA members and sharing perspectives in the grassroots.

Finally, as this is part of a three-year process, the participants have committed themselves to make follow-up activities back in their communities to empower indigenous and dalit women and will make case studies that they will bring back to a big gathering in 2007. The IWALT network can then be part of an offerings for the CCA jubilee celebrations!



Sharing more about Asian feminist theology

Special opportunities to dispel myths and misunderstandings

During the months of October and November, CCA's Faith Mission and Unity program area was able to share actively about Asian feminist theology with various groups of people. Hope Antone, joint executive secretary of CCA-FMU, considers these occasions special opportunities to dispel myths and misunderstandings that people have about feminism and to appreciate its concerns for and impact on women in Asia in particular.

* * *

The first opportunity was through Hope Antone's lecture-presentation at the general assembly of the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA), held at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology in Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 16–20 October. She spoke on the theme, 'Women's Role in Transformational Leader-

ship: Contributions of Feminist Leadership to Theological Education' to a group of 115 people representing member seminaries of ATESEA.

'Feminist leadership is not guaranteed or assured by simply putting a woman at the helm of leadership. Women who have been socialised throughout their lives in a patriarchal way of thinking, doing and living, may continue to propagate the traditional type of leadership, which is hierarchical, authoritarian or authority-figure-centred, and self-serving. But feminist leadership actively seeks an alternative, transformative, egalitarian, collective and life-enhancing type of leadership,' Antone pointed out.

'By feminist leadership, I mean a style or model of leadership that is grounded in the belief that women and men are created in the image of God. It is therefore critical of

the distortion of God's image in the present patriarchal or male-dominated set-up where women are marginalised, oppressed and dehumanised. It is committed to the transformation of this state of things to bring about a more egalitarian and abundant way of life for all in God's creation,' Antone added.

* * *

The second opportunity was at a national workshop that CCA-FMU coorganised with a group of Thai women on 20–22 October, also at McGilvary Faculty of Theology in Payap University, Chiang Mai. The theme of the workshop was 'Living in *Oikoumene*: Affirming Partnership of Women and Men'. It was attended by at least 45 people, including seminary faculty, pastors and alumni from seminaries in Thailand. There were also some students from Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and some seminary faculty from Myanmar.

'First we need to change within ourselves and then help create change among the people we live and work with.'—This was the general feedback of the participants at the end of the workshop. 'We should have done this long ago,' some faculty participants said after listening to various inputs and actively participating in discussion groups.

'Before, I used to think negatively of ecumenism,' one male participant confessed. 'But through this workshop I have realised that being ecumenical is part of our biblical mandate,' he added.

Hope Antone made two introductory presentations on ecumenism and Asian feminist theology. Anna May Say Pa, principal of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, facilitated the discussion and workshop on feminist



Participants dance and sing, 'When the Spirit of our God is in our hearts we can dance as Miriam danced ...'

hermeneutics. Mary Dun, another faculty member of MIT, did a presentation on Asian women's spirituality. Chuleepran Srisoontorn facilitated the sharing about Thai women's reality and the remembering of Thai women leaders.

The group expressed the need for a follow-up activity that would deal with the issue of sexuality, including homosexuality.

* * *

A third opportunity was through an input-presentation that Hope Antone made at the international workshop on 'creating and sharing worship resources on women and healing' of the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music in Quezon City, Philippines, on 11–20 November.

With the use of a Powerpoint presentation on 'Women and Healing: An Asian Feminist Perspective', Antone began by describing the broken world in which we all live because 'we have failed to deal with our plurality creatively by living as interconnected and interdependent beings'. Instead we live as broken beings that are separated, opposed and in enmity towards each other because of differences in sex/gender, race, class and caste and because of oppression resulting



from neocolonisation (globalisation, the 'war on terror'), religious chauvinism and anthropocentrism.

However, Antone proposed that Asian feminist theology could be a tool for our healing. It helps us to diagnose our problems, as we are equipped to name the oppression experienced by women and other vulnerable sectors of society. It helps us to go into the roots of the oppression and to challenge traditional theologies and ideologies that support the oppression. Above all, it challenges us to think of alternatives to

transform the situation. But what has this to do with artists? Theology and art go hand in hand, Antone explained. While art in the past reflected the theology of patriarchal times, art today has the potential to bring about healing and transformation of the distortions that have been made through history. Artists and theologians today are called to correct the distortions in theology and to use both art and theology to advocate for peace with justice, for healing and transformation, she concluded.

—Hope S. Antone

Ecumenical lectures in India and Philippines

Two seminaries host the CCA ecumenical lectures series

India

John Roberts Theological Seminary, formerly known as Cherra Theological College, hosted the CCA Ecumenical Lectures Series on 19–20 September on its campus in Mawklot, Shillong, Meghalaya, in northeast India. It was the first time the seminary had hosted a CCA activity, which featured three ecumenical lecturers on the theme, 'Teaching to Live

in *Oikoumene*: Integrating Ecumenism in Theological Education'.

The three lecturers were Hope Antone, CCA-FMU executive secretary, on 'Learning to Live in *Oikoumene*: Towards an Ecumenical Theological Education', Anna May Say Pa, principal of Myanmar Institute of Theology, on 'Chorus of Voices: Reading the Bible from Many Perspectives', and Chuleepran Srisoon-

torn, McGilvary Faculty of Theology, Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 'Pastoral Theology from an Ecumenical Perspective'.

Hope Antone highlighted some biblical bases for ecumenism and described the current state of the world as characterised by brokenness, alienation and hostility. She went on to describe the need for shifts in our thinking and practice: from competition



Anna May Say Pa

to cooperation among Christian denominations: from condemnation to dialogue with other religious or faith communities, from isolation to collaboration with civil society and people's movements and from disintegration to integrity of creation.

In order to facilitate these shifts towards ecumenical thinking, theological education needs to teach the radical or root meaning of ecumenism, not only as a movement towards Christian unity among Christian denominations but also as a movement towards the actualisation of the fullness of life of all beings in the great web of life. Theological education needs to facilitate self-criticism of our attitudes to plurality, especially religious plurality, and intentional efforts at developing more pluralist attitudes of openness, dialogue and collaboration with the rest in God's household. This means promoting meaningful encounters that affirm and celebrate diversity and foster mutual enrichment and growth as well as mutual correction for the

sake of a just and peace-filled life for all.

Anna May Say Pa, a Bible scholar and feminist theologian, highlighted the fact that the Bible contains a community of voices, with very diverse views. Likewise, there has also been a diversity of interpretation of biblical texts. In fact, the field is no longer the monopoly of a learned few. Emphasis in interpretation has also shifted from the text to the reader and there are new methodological tools being used in interpretation.

'So long as the aim of biblical hermeneutics is to bring the biblical text alive and relevant to the modern reader, where text, context and reader can interact, then the new ways of interpreting and presenting the text are valid and authoritative as the traditional ones. The Bible belongs to the people who are challenged and affirmed by it. The community's interpretation and presentation that makes the Bible alive and relevant is normative and authoritative for that community,' Anna May Say Pa stated.

She highlighted the need to hear the minority voices in the chorus, e.g. the voices of the minority ethnic groups, voices from other cultures and religions and women's voices.

Chuleepran Srisoontorn used a case study of an HIV/AIDS patient in her presentation on pastoral theology. The most urgent task in the wake of HIV/AIDS is caring for human needs and dispelling the fears or anxiety that often lead to discrimination and ostracism of those with the virus and their families.

'Each of us is part of God's family—in Christ we are one. The world may have sepa-

rated us by countries, cultures, races, borders and even denominations, but in truth we are all children of a loving God who cares for everyone of us,' Srisoontorn emphasised.

CCA-FMU co-organised the ecumenical lectures with Rev. Edwin E.H. Kharkongor, seminary principal. More than a hundred students, faculty members and some elders of the Presbyterian Church attended the lectures.

Philippines

The CCA-SUDS (Silliman University Divinity School) Ecumenical Lectures were held in the context of the 44th Annual Church Workers Convocation, through two Bible study lectures led by Hope Antone in Dumaguete City in the Philippines on 31 August and 1 September.

'We live in a plural or diverse world. What is threatening the world is not because we have different religions, languages, cultures etc. but because we have used our differences to lord over, eat up or subjugate the other. It is high time we revisit the original intention of God for creating the world,' Antone stated in her first lecture, on the topic, 'Proclaiming the Gospel in a Plural World'.

So what is the gospel that we proclaim in this plural world? There is also a diversity of Christological formulations in the Bible, reflecting that Jesus had meant many things for the people at different times and in their different experiences. Hence, it is interesting to note that while Jesus, the messenger of the good news of the reign of God, later became the message or content of the gospel himself. So it is important that no single image of Jesus be absolutised—all images must be seen in terms of how they balance and complement each other.

In the second lecture, on 'Dialogue of Life as Our Way of Proclaiming the Gospel', Antone described dialogue of life as something that does not happen at the spur of the moment, like an ambulance that is called on when conflict arises. Rather it includes ongoing nurture throughout one's life in the mindset and lifestyle of mutual understanding, mutual respect, mutual enrichment and mutual correction.

—Hope S. Antone



Ecumenical lecturers with John Roberts Theological Seminary students and faculty

The challenge of campus student ministry

CCA and WSCF AP joint meeting held in Hong Kong

The CCA and WSCF Asia Pacific Joint Committee met in November at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong. The meeting was attended by six representatives from the two organisations: Rev. Dr Roger Gaikwad, chairperson of WSCF AP, Ms Nina Nayoan, WSCF Exco member, Ms Necta Montes Rocas, regional secretary of WSCF AP, Ms Chung Chih, incoming youth secretary of CCA, Ms Lu Yeuh Wen, youth president of CCA, and Mr Lesley Capus, NCCP youth coordinator.

It had the following objectives:

- to reconstitute the joint committee and provide orientation by reviewing its role and history,
- to review the evaluation conducted in 2003 by the committee on the activities on the CWP and identify its strengths and weaknesses,
- to identify the situation and current needs for ecumenical student ministry work in Asia and the Pacific,
- to revisit and discuss the common vision of CCA and WSCF AP for student and youth ministry in Asia Pacific,
- to identify the goals of the CWP and plan for concrete projects and activities for the period 2006–2007.

On the first day of the meeting, the participants immediately clarified and identified roles and functions, considering that all the members of the joint committee are new. Based on the joint statement agreed upon during the CCA WSCF joint consultation held in Hong Kong in 2003, the role of the committee is 'to ensure the implementation and monitoring of suggested action plans in this consultation (2003)'. With this mandate, the

committee clarified and further added the following roles and functions to ensure that this role is properly carried out:

- to bridge the difference in the understanding of the ecumenical movement and its varied expressions in the constituencies of each organisation,
- to provide opportunity and space to link the constituencies of each organisation,
- to recommend joint activities and plans to each organisation,
- to plan and ensure the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the joint activities,
- to evaluate the role and performance of the committee.

The committee also agreed that the joint meetings should be held at least once a year or in conjuncture with any joint activity. They also affirmed the importance of inviting a representative from each organisation to attend as an observer in the meetings of each group, such as the regional committee meeting of the WSCF AP in July 2006 and the CCA youth secretaries meeting in March 2006. This will enhance the partnership by being aware of the realities, priorities, concerns, and limitations, as well as the dynamics of each organisation.

As a follow-through of the plans made during the consultation in 2003, the committee reviewed the recommended short-, medium- and long-term plans. Although some of the short-term activities were implemented, it was observed that there was minimal attention given to more strategic activities that would have meaningful impact to the members and constituents of each organisation. Hence the committee focused

its energy in planning joint activities that will directly respond to the needs of the churches and the SCMs in the national level, and will have a strategic impact on the long-term vision and mission of the CCA and WSCF joint partnership.

The following are concrete programs and recommendations that will be jointly implemented by CCA and WSCF in the next two years. These activities will take into account the thematic focus on higher education and interfaith dialogue.

The first joint project in 2006 will be a baseline research project on the churches' campus student ministry in Asia Pacific, which will be conducted by a CCA intern from October 2005 to June 2007. This project will provide the necessary information on the situation and the needs of campus student ministry, and hopefully, assist in identifying appropriate strategies to provide support to churches and SCMs in campus ministry work. National consultations between churches and SCMs will continue in Australia and Thailand in 2006, and Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Timor Leste in 2007. The national planning committees will be encouraged to focus these activities on the theme 'The Challenge of Campus Student Ministry in the Context of Pluralistic World'. The committee also affirmed an earlier recommendation for a joint CCA and WSCF youth secretaries and coordinators meeting in mid-2007, focusing on interfaith dialogue.

Lastly, the School for Ecumenical Leadership Formation (SELF) in October 2007 will once again be a joint undertaking between the two organisations.

—Necta Montes Rocas

The plight of stateless children in Sabah

Acting today for tomorrow's generation

Sixty-one participants from 24 organisations and communities from Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore came together 16–18 November in Kota Kinabalu to address the plight, conditions and the realities of the estimated over 10,000 stateless and undocumented children in the state of Sabah, Malaysia. The program was organised by Tenaganita, CCA Urban Rural Mission and the Asia Pacific Mission on Migration.

The issue of stateless/undocumented children in Sabah is complex. There are four distinct groups of children: children of refugees, children of locals who have not been registered, children of migrant workers (both documented and undocumented) and stateless children.

In the absence of education and social support mechanisms, children as young as 5 are working and very young girls are vulnerable to syndicates and human traffickers. If this situation is not addressed Sabah faces social unrest.

While there have been initiatives to help the children through education programs, there remains a fear among organisations that the authorities would use the immigration act to charge them for harbouring illegals.

The children are also from the Philippines and Indonesia, so there has to be regional cooperation and commitment from all three governments to address the emerging concerns of the stateless children. Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia have all ratified the UN convention on the rights of children. These countries are therefore obliged to protect and promote the rights of these children. A key right that must be addressed immediately is the right of the child to education.

Besides addressing the need for education the children need access to basic health care.

The political will to address the issue will also reduce the discrimination, exploitation and marginalisation of children.



Josef Widyatmadja, CCA, Irene Fernandez, Tenaganita, and Connie Bragas-Regalado, APMM





Children lighting a candle to remember the stateless and undocumented children in Sabah

The programs and initiatives for change must be complemented by border controls, revision of recruitment laws and policies for foreign labour. Similarly, the Philippine and Indonesian governments can no longer close their eyes to the growing needs of these children. There is a dire need for the two governments to strengthen consular services and to reach out to their nationals with a greater effort, especially in the interior areas.

The conference made the following recommendations:

- All children born in Malaysia should be given birth certificates and accorded citizenship.
- The right to free education must be awarded to all children including vocational training and skills development programs.
- There must be a strengthening of the monitoring and enforcement of child labour and trafficking laws.
- The adoption and reunification process of children with immediate family members must be facilitated.
- Research must be conducted to estimate the numbers of undocumented and stateless children.
- A special tripartite task force (private sector, NGOs and government agencies) should be established to address the issue.
- The Malaysian federal and state governments should invite UNICEF to initiate a process of interventions and the develop-

ment of programs for the children.

- Amnesty should be given to NGOs working with migrant communities.
- Coordinated campaigns in the three countries should be conducted, including lobbying national government agencies, media events and protest actions. International agencies such as the UNHCR and UNICEF will be encouraged to take part in

the campaign.

- There should be an ASEAN summit on children.
- The governments of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia should conduct collaborative and coordinated efforts in conducting a census of the population of undocumented migrants, including children, in Malaysia.

Tenaganita

Tenaganita is an organisation that works with migrant workers, women and children. In 2002, when the Malaysian government conducted a massive crackdown on undocumented workers, thousands of immigrants and migrant workers who were undocumented fled to the nearest islands of Nunukan at the border with Indonesia or to Taw-tawi in Mindanao, Philippines.

Tenaganita went on a fact-finding mission to Nunukan in East Kalimantan and Tawau and Kota Kinabalu in Sabah. It found that there were large numbers of people who had stayed in Sabah for more than 20 years. The team met hundreds of children who had 'lost' their parents during the crackdown. Mothers and fathers were arrested and the children were left

behind. Some of the children's parents were refugees from Mindanao who had fled to Sabah during the Moro liberation uprising in the 1970s and 1980s. These children were now living and or working in horrific conditions.

The organisation then decided to conduct another fact-finding mission, this time focusing solely on the stateless children, in July 2005, covering Tawau, Sandakan, Keningau and Kota Kinabalu. The team, headed by Ms Aegile Fernandez, met hundreds of children, their parents, guardians, 'god parents', community leaders, village heads and relevant authorities and enforcement agencies.

There are over 10,000 stateless children involved, and they face a bleak future.

People of hope against all hope

DOV Focus on Asia consultation

The recently concluded Decade to Overcome Violence consultation, held 21–23 November 2005 at Leilem, Indonesia, validated the analyses and perspectives of different churches and councils and the CCA on the concrete situation of Asian people who are struggling to overcome all forms of violence. The storytelling, the sharing of experiences of individuals and of groups and public consultation widened the perspective of each participant on the reality faced by Asian people, churches and councils.

This is a difficult moment of history, when people have been going through all kinds of disasters—economic crises, communal conflicts, bombings, gross human rights violations and natural disasters like the tsunami. The delegates read the signs of the time as a kairotic moment for calling Asia and the whole world, including the churches, to commit themselves to build communities of peace for *all*.

Religion, whose primary mission is to promote life and peace in a troubled world, has become a source of violence both wittingly and unwittingly. The consultation recognised the need for us to have a self-critical reflection on our own theology, ridding it of chauvinism and misuse of scriptures. Moreover, the delegates realised that more and more, religions are being abused by both state and non-state actors for self-serving political ends, as is now happening in Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

On the other hand, structural and systemic violence, such as in the Philippines, Nepal and Japan, among others, causes people of faith to raise their prophetic voice against militarisation, human rights violations and

increasing poverty. Asia is now plagued by renewed militarisation—a growing arms race, the prioritisation of military budgets over those for social services and education, the violent suppression and even murder of political dissidents, church people and peacemakers and the diminution of civil rights and liberties.

The violence brought by the WTO and globalisation treat people not as human beings created in God's image but as mere objects of exploitation and tools to strengthen the control and monopoly of the world's resources by the powerful few at the expense of the poor, deprived and oppressed people of Asia and the world. The gurus of economic globalisation have long preached that as long as the Asian countries adopt the neoliberal paradigm, their economy will grow and prosper. However, this logic has turned out to be flawed, as demonstrated by the unprecedented economic crises suffered by the so-called Asian dragons. These countries followed the neoliberal model faithfully, but their economies are now in disarray, taken over by rapacious foreign capital. Thus the more underdeveloped countries of Asia have sunk even deeper in poverty and underdevelopment. In many Asian countries, unemployment and rural dislocation are rampant. Even university graduates are being denied opportunities for employment and farmers are deprived of their sources of livelihood.

As the conference came to an end, in consonance with the Decade to Overcome Violence Focus on Asia, the participants were challenged to commit themselves to promote life-enhancing politics, just social formations, economic programs addressing the needs and aspirations of people and of

the earth, a culture of dialogue and tolerance, harmonious religious coexistence and solidarity among people of faith in order to overcome all forms of violence generated by exclusivist demands, from individualistic ego to empires.

The DOV Focus on Asian recognised that Asian people are people of hope against all hope. (Romans 4:18) In spite of immense suffering, Asians can still smile, ever hospitable to our neighbours and strangers. Asian people are still celebrating life given by God, singing and dancing. The culture of silence in Asia does not mean that the Asian people are in silence all the time. The Asian people will resist any power when their dignity and conditions of life are denied, as the Asian historical experience has proved. Asian churches have been active participants towards change and transformation.

Thus, in struggle and prayer the Asian people firmly believe that God's grace is in our midst and we are challenged to transform the world to one wherein peace and justice prevails. Amidst the reality faced by Asian people and the difficulties faced by Asian churches and councils to overcome violence as part and parcel of the whole mission and ministry of the church, the letter of St Paul to the Romans serves as an inspiration to persevere. 'In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For [we are] convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37–39). Amen.

—Joram H. Calimutan

Uniting people in Asia

General committee meets in Chiang Mai

A CCA general committee meeting was held from 29 September to 2 October 2005. Thirty-five people, including staff and resource persons, attended the meeting, which was held at the Crystal Springs House in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The meeting began with worship on 29 September. Dr Feliciano Cariño spoke on the composition, powers and functions of the general committee in CCA and the ecumenical movement. Rev. Dr Hwang Po-Ho, president of Tainan Theological College and Seminary, presented a paper on 'Uniting People in Asia through a Christian Movement: Ecumenical Movements in Pluralistic Asia'. He made many suggestions on restructuring the Asian ecumenical movement to make it more vital, vibrant and relevant.

The meeting also heard reports presented by Dr Prawate Khid-arn, CCA general secretary, and Rev. Josef Widyatmadja, CCA acting associate general secretary for finance.

The reports of the CCA program areas were presented on the second day of the



meeting. The participants also visited the site of the possible CCA centre in Chiang Mai that day.

Among the major decisions taken by the general committee were the appointments of two new staff persons. Rev. Smith Na Za Thwang from Myanmar was appointed associate general secretary for finance for four years and Ms Chang Chun Chi from Taiwan was appointed joint executive secretary for EGY. The committee requested Ms Cora Tabing-Reyes and Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja to complete their terms of four years. The committee also appointed Mr Anthony Row as an additional member of the personnel commit-

tee. The meeting recommended that efforts should be made to reactivate the membership of churches in Singapore. The meeting noted that Singapore only suspended its membership from CCA and never withdrew from it. The inclusion of churches in Central Asia was also discussed at the meeting.

The general committee meeting formally ended on 1 October. In the evening, an installation ceremony of the new general secretary of CCA was held at the Payap University chapel. Hong Kong Anglican Bishop Thomas Soo, the CCA treasurer, led the installation service.

—Philip Mathew



CCA general committee, staff and support persons at Crystal Springs House, Chiang Mai, Thailand

CCA relocation

Highlights and update

A taskforce was set up before CCA's 12th General Assembly to consider moving the CCA office. The taskforce proposed that CCA relocate to Chiang Mai in Thailand.

2 April 2005

The 12th CCA General Assembly meeting in Chiang Mai approved the relocation proposal in principle, and authorised the incoming General Committee to work out the next steps of the relocation.

5 April 2005

The new General Committee, at its first meeting, at Payap University, formed two relocation task forces, one based in Hong Kong (HKTF) to sell the existing property, handle other matters related to staff and to keep the legal status of CCA in Hong Kong, and the second based in Thailand (TTF) to work on the registering of the CCA Foundation in Thailand and to help prepare for a suitable site for the CCA centre in Chiang Mai.

These two task forces would be coordinated by a CCA Relocation Task Force (CCATF), which included Bishop Thomas Soo (moderator), Rev. Dr Pradit Takerangrangsarit, Mr Anthony Row and Ms Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes.

23 May 2005

The HKTF discussed several possible options relating to the disposal of the property.

- Direct sale to churches and Christian institutions.
- Sale through property agents to developers and construction companies.

Landscape, which did the second valuation exercise, was to be invited to help conduct an open tender exercise for the second option.

14–15 June 2005

The CCATF met at the Bangkok Christian Guest House to receive reports and updated information of the HKTF and TTF. The following were proposed to be founding committee members of the CCA Foundation: Dr Boonthong Poochareon (chairperson), Rev. Dr Sint Kimhachandra (vice chairperson), Dr Prawate Khid-arn, Rev. Dr Pradit Takerangrangsarit, Rev. Dr Chuleepran, Dr Rux Prompalit and Mr Chutipong Somsap. The registration process began.

8 August 2005

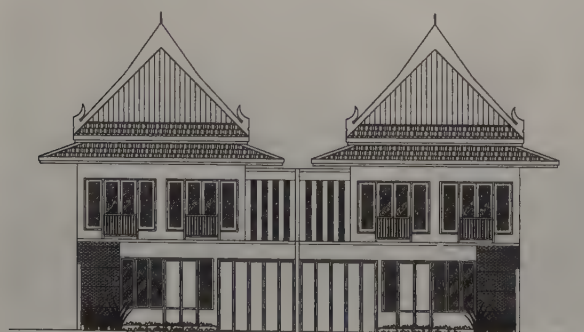
The CCATF met in Chiang Mai. Three sites of land were explored. The committee decided to recommend to the general committee to buy one of the parcels of land from

the Church of Christ in Thailand. Two architects were invited to the meeting to help design the new CCA centre. The committee also asked the TTF to look for the temporary office space for CCA if it decides to move to Chiang Mai earlier.

28 September – 1 October 2005

At its second meeting, at the Crystal Spring House in Chiang Mai, the general committee:

- was informed that an application for the CCA Foundation had been submitted,
- ratified the decision to register the Foundation of Christian Conference of Asia as an international organisation based in Chiang Mai, Thailand,
- ratified the decision made to submit the above names as founding members of the board of the Christian Conference of Asia Foundation. The members of the board of the Christian Conference of Asia will be changed after the registration process is completed,
- further authorised the executive committee to take appropriate action in regard to the sale by tender of property in Hong Kong.
- ratified the agreement entered into by Landscape Surveyors Ltd and the Chris-



Elevation A

Architect's suggestions for CCA housing in Chiang Mai



Elevation B

CCA to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2007

In March 1957 a conference held at Prapat, on the banks of Lake Toba in Sumatra, Indonesia, marked the beginning of a new and historic stage in the journey of churches in Asia together. The participants at Prapat recommended that an "Eastern Asia Christian Conference" be constituted as an organ of continuing cooperation among the churches and Christian councils in

the region. Thus what was to become the Christian Conference of Asia was born.

We are seeking to celebrate the jubilee of this event in 2007, and invite you to give suggestions as to how this might be done.

A celebratory event immediately comes to mind, but other ideas might include:

- an art festival of poetry, music, paintings and other media etc.,
- a book and/or a DVD,

- the jubilee theme, "Building communities of peace for all", to be incorporated into other events, e.g. Asia Sunday, symposiums etc.

Artists, writers, designers, film-makers, musicians and the like are also encouraged to contact us as to how they could contribute. Please email your ideas to CCA at cca@cca.org.hk, or write, fax or phone us as shown on page 3.

tian Conference of Asia regarding the sale of the Hong Kong property,

- authorised the CCA general secretary to appoint a lawyer/legal representative to handle the sale by tender of the CCA property in Hong Kong,
- agreed to purchase the Board of Welfare property of the Church of Christ in Thai-

land (CCT), measuring 11-1-08 rais, for the CCA office and the staff housing unit.

The architects presented a blueprint of the proposed new CCA centre, and a blueprint for a temporary office at the Crystal Spring Guest House campus. The buildings are designed in Northern Thai style. The general committee mandated the Executive Commit-

tee to look into the temporary office and staff residence.

3 November 2005

The CCA Foundation in Chiang Mai was officially approved.

15 November 2005

The HKTF appointed Mr Clement Tang as the CCA solicitor to help in the sale of the property. The HKTF recommended that CCA retains its legal status in Hong Kong and decided to request the Hong Kong Christian Council to allow CCA to use its physical address as its mailing address in Hong Kong, at least until CCA's relocation in Chiang Mai is secured. The HKTF also expressed concern about the future of the support staff and agreed that CCA should assist them as much as possible, especially to seek employment among churches and ecumenical organisations in Hong Kong.

17 November 2005

The HKTF met with the solicitor and Landscape to begin the process of preparing the Hong Kong property for sale. The proposed timeframe for completion of the sale is July 2006.



People working at the CCA Centre in Hong Kong in November 2005

The mission of the Toraja Church

'Be transformed by the renewing of your minds'

The Toraja Church in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, held a mission consultation on 20–24 May 2005 under the theme 'Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Minds'. (Romans 12:2)

This was part of a continuous effort of the Toraja Church towards a self-understanding of its mission in the changing situation of Indonesia. Although the gospel, the good news about the salvation granted by God in Jesus Christ, which is offered to all, has not changed, the world in which the gospel is shared is rapidly changing. Dr Eka Darmaputera, an Indonesian theologian who passed away recently, stressed that 'when the world is changed, the agenda of the church should change precisely because the mission of the church is unchangeable'. Realities of Torajanese culture, globalisation and Islam

were identified as the context of the Toraja Church. Plurality is considered not simply as a sociological issue but as a theological one as well. Globalisation has brought its values that are in tension with the local culture. Many incidents in Indonesia and around the world that are readily associated with Islam as a religion are affecting our spiritual journey and struggle for peace with justice for all.

Attended by 70 clergy and lay participants, the consultation called on Christians to 'enjoy the gospel', making it the centre of their life as disciples of Christ, and sharing it with the world so that the fullness of life may be experienced by all. Each congregation is called to be a missionary congregation, each Christian an evangelist who must proclaim the gospel in their daily encounter with oth-

ers, including in the way they live their life.

In the plural context of Asia, the church is challenged to properly understand the so-called 'great commission' in Matthew 28:19–20. When 'evangelism' is associated with 'Christianisation' or 'winning souls' etc., a gap can be created between Christians and people of other faiths and can sometimes lead to conflict and hostility. Thus, there is a need to explore other alternatives to convey the understanding that we are neighbours and fellow human beings who need salvation and eternal life from the loving God and that such love must be expressed in our respect for each other and the rest of creation.

The dialectical relationship of gospel and culture was discussed in depth. Whereas culture tended to be viewed in the past as a source of dark and evil powers, the consultation clarified that God works mysteriously beyond times and places, and that the seeds of the gospel may be present in human cultures. In the encounter of the gospel of Jesus Christ and culture, the seeds of the gospel within the culture are clearly unfolded and recognised and the transforming works of the Holy Spirit through human culture can be manifested and celebrated. It is the Holy Spirit that leads the church throughout history, including human culture, to give a meaningful presence of the gospel in the world.

The consultation compared traditional culture with the culture of globalisation and called upon the Torajanese to discover the seeds of the gospel in their traditional culture and to bring it to the life of the church as part of their spiritual heritage, whereas they need to be careful with the culture of



Participants at the Toraja Church mission consultation



globalisation, which can be a 'blessing' and also a 'curse'. The challenge is to discover and celebrate the signs of God's presence in the midst of globalisation, and in the light of the gospel transform the embedded values of individualism, materialism, consumerism and greed that threaten the fullness of life for all. This requires a transforming heart and the renewing of one's mind, at personal and social levels.

Highlighting religious pluralism, the consultation invited Ulil Abshar Abdalla, a young Muslim leader, who said that in a democratic society it is impossible for one group to impose its own opinion. Since each religion has a long history of struggle to discover its identity in the Indonesian context, the idea of a 'supermarket of ideas' should be allowed so that a dynamic interaction of different groups can be facilitated. A healthy public life happens when the community opens itself to a variety of perspectives, and so fanaticism and extremism can be minimised.

The consultation affirmed that the crucial role of religion is to accompany its members to choose life for all so that each person can contribute something valuable for the building of peace with justice in society. Thus, the group also affirmed the importance of 'daily life dialogue' among neighbours.

The consultation received inputs from academics and practitioners, which were further discussed in small group discussions.

—Ery Hutabarat-Lebang

Economic justice

Meetings planned to coincide with WTO ministerial meeting in Hong Kong

The Christian Conference of Asia joined other ecumenical bodies and civil society groups in calling for the 'globalising of economic justice and social sustainability' on 8–12 December and for 'life-promoting trade' on 12–14 December in Hong Kong.

These meetings were planned parallel to the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), 13–18 December in Hong Kong.

An ecumenical initiative of 15 ecumenical organisations, the conference on 'globalising economic justice and social sustainability' was a platform for faith communities to critique the role and reflect on the economic justice aspect of WTO, and search for alternatives towards social justice and sustainability. Aside from keynote presentations on the theme, various thematic workshops were

held on human security, food sovereignty, privatisation, corporate social responsibility, religion and globalisation, ecology, land and water and migrants and migration.

The second conference was the global ecumenical women's forum on life-promoting trade, organised jointly by CCA, the World Council of Churches' Program on Women and Globalisation and three other ecumenical organisations in Hong Kong and Asia. This activity was the result of a recommendation by a group of churchwomen and feminist economists to 'vigilantly monitor trade policies and to challenge the WTO at its forthcoming ministerial' in August 2004 in Manila. These women from Asia and other parts of the world are not only critical of ongoing trade policies but are calling for a global trading system that prioritises provisioning for life before profit.

Meanwhile, a roundtable meeting on 'WTO, the Empire and Religious Wars: Taking the Faith Communities to the Front Lines' involved participants from faith-based organisations, social movements and the academe on 15–17 December, organised by Peace for Life, a people's forum and movement for global justice and peace. A public session of the roundtable meeting was to have taken place on 15 December, including a memorial for all victims of global expansionism of empire and a celebration of heroism and struggles for justice and peace.

In this connection and in line with the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) Focus on Asia in 2005, CCA produced a campaign booklet, 'Peace Means Economic Justice', to contribute to the churches' education on and advocacy for economic justice as a most needed mark of peace in Asia today.

Contemplative communicators

Communication ministry in Asia urged to highlight gospel values

A meeting on 'Asian spirituality for communications' has recommended to the church to provide Christian communicators with 'appropriate spiritual formation for their unique ministry'.

'Asian spiritualities, Asian value systems and communication approaches that characterise the contemplative mindset of Asians need to be highlighted and developed through a proper formation and training,' the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences—Office for Social Communications (FABC-OSC) bishop's meet said.

In a statement, the bishops' meeting noted that a Christian communicator must be a person of deep faith rooted in the Bible with the personal acceptance of Jesus as saviour, redeemer and liberator. The person involved in communication needs to have a contemplative and prayerful spirit that reflects communication in the context of Asian spiritualities and values. Gospel values for life must be highlighted by the communication ministries situated in a multireligious situation in Asia, the 10th meet, held in Hua Hin in Thailand said.

The 21–26 November meet, attended by 32 bishops and communications experts, felt that a Christian communicator must be committed to justice, human rights, the integrity of creation and pro-life issues. 'A Christian communicator must constantly engage in dialogue with one's own community, and be open to the kingdom values reflected in other living faith traditions of Asia,' the statement noted.

Referring to the current sociopolitical and economic situation and the natural and

human-made disasters in different parts of Asia, the meet said that 'these situations must be considered an invitation for deeper reflection and spirit-based collaboration within and outside the church'.

The participants of the meet, who came from 15 Asian countries, urged the Christian communicators in the region to address the challenges of secularism, consumerism, materialism and the craving for comfort 'with a prophetic discernment that is based on contemplation and prayer'. They also wanted local churches in Asia's multicultural context to explore ways to deepen their communication ministry.

They expressed the view that the specific Asian dimension of communication lies in the deep conviction for silence and contemplation, and also in the yearning for harmony, oneness with creation and openness

to the spirit reflected in the various religious traditions of Asia. Presenting a paper on 'Spirituality for Communications', the Redemptorist Bishop George Yod Phimpisan told the participants that Christian communication should lead to a participatory church, a witnessing church, a dialoguing church and a prophetic church.

Among those who addressed the meet were Mr Hector Welgampola, a well-known Asian journalist and the former executive editor of *Union of Catholic Asian News*, Ms Virginia Saldanha, secretary for FABC Office of Laity and Women and Fr Franz-Josef Eilers, secretary for FABC-OSC. The meet reviewed the communication-related documents of the Asian bishops and examined the statements made by the FABC-OSC in the last ten years on spirituality.

—Philip Mathew



Fr Franz-Josef Eilers, executive secretary of FABC Office for Social Communication (right), addressing the bishop's meet and Archbishop Oswald Gracias from India

Another tourism is possible

Workshop calls for peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land

Twenty-one participants from fourteen countries attended a workshop, 'Human Encounters for Peace and Reconciliation through Tourism', in Alexandria, Egypt, 21–24 October 2005. Through discussions, participants identified defining issues and questions for deliberation in order to develop a plan for continued action on justice and peace in the Occupied Territories.

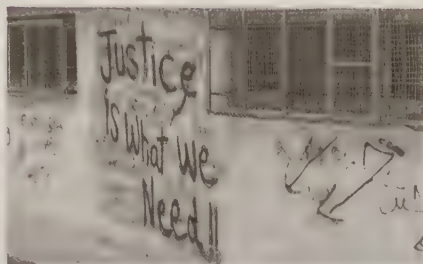
Through interfaith reflections on the Bible the participants were challenged by messages of spiritual empowerment that have political and social content, specifically the imperative to 'break the silence' about oppression or 'we will all perish', and the imperative to confront and relinquish power, including our own, in order to break our isolation and embrace interdependence as we insist on human dignity.

The participants of the workshop issued the following letter at the conclusion of their deliberations.

To our organisations and networks:

We are twenty-one people from fourteen countries who gathered together for four days in Alexandria, Egypt, at the invitation of the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT), Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) and Golan for Development to study the role that tourism is playing in the Israel–Palestine conflict and to consider alternatives so that tourism in the area can help promote a just peace and not continue to perpetuate oppression, injustice and economic disparity.

During our time together we have come to see how the reality of globalisation and its negative consequences for the poorest of the poor (the wretched of the earth) has been hidden and pushed aside by the rhetoric of



the "war on terror". At the same time, we have examined how tourism plays a key role in the project of globalisation. Tourism is big business, which benefits some at the expense of many while also promoting ruthless consumerism that often violates the lives and dignity of people as well as harming the environment. Nowhere is this truer than in the Holy Land in the context of the illegal occupation of Palestine. In our deliberations we heard testimonies of the brutal realities suffered by the Palestinian people since 1948. This includes discrimination and violation of the basic human rights of Palestinians within Israel as well as the economic, social and political suffering of those living in the Palestinian territories under military occupation. Their rights under international law are grossly and systematically violated by the State of Israel. We also heard of the suffering of the millions of Palestinian refugees living in exile in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other places who, because of Israel's occupation of their homelands, are not able to return to Palestine.

We addressed this political reality from a religious perspective by sharing together in Bible reading and reflection. We were all challenged by the imperative to break the culture of silence in the face of human suffering. We were moved by the call to put human dignity first in everything we do and to challenge and relinquish abusive power so that we can become interdependent and

rediscover our humanity. As a group we affirmed that 'another tourism is possible' and we have formed a working group within ECOT, with ATG as the secretariat, to promote justice tourism as a viable alternative. This will be done by fostering human encounters that can help break the culture of silence and lead to political awareness, personal transformation of the visitor and the visited, and contribute to a just peace through advocacy and political action.

We are also committed to challenging, transforming and countering the tendency of mainstream tourism and pilgrimage to the Holy Lands. We will work through church, social movements and religious institutions to challenge the Israeli tourism monopoly and ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared with the Palestinians. We ask church-related groups and other tours going to the Holy Land to carefully inform themselves about the realities of Palestinian life under occupation before beginning their pilgrimages.

They must understand that they are not simply visiting historical and religious places, but are also encountering people struggling within very difficult political and social realities. Journeys should be organised so that benefits can be fairly shared by the local people and not just by those who presently monopolise the travel industry.

We were reminded again of the importance of ensuring that Palestine is clearly located on international maps, especially those appearing in our publications. The identity of the Palestinian people and their right to their homeland must be constantly affirmed.

We want to include regional Middle Eastern groups in this initiative and call on international and national organisations to join us so that tourism becomes a powerful force for peace with justice in the Holy Land.

Ninth WCC Assembly

Praying for a transformed world

The 9th assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) will be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during 14–23 February 2006. Its theme is a prayer: 'God, in your grace, transform the world.'

The first WCC assembly of the 21st century, it will gather up to 3,000 church leaders and ecumenical representatives from nearly every Christian tradition around the world. As such, it will be one of the broadest global gatherings of its kind.

WCC assemblies are often turning points in the life of the world council, and this one is expected to leave its mark on ecumenical history. Deliberations will focus on issues such as the future of the ecumenical movement, the churches' commitment to economic justice as well as their witness to overcoming violence and the challenges faced in the midst of religious plurality.

In Porto Alegre, members of the ecumenical family will be able to gather around the assembly at a *mutirão*, a Portuguese word that means coming together for a common purpose. Made up of workshops, exhibitions and cultural celebrations, this part of the assembly program will offer opportunities for members of the wider ecumenical movement to gather, reflect and celebrate together.

This is the first WCC assembly to be held in Latin America, and it is being hosted by the National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil (CONIC) on behalf of churches throughout the region. Pre-assembly events for youth and for women will be held 11–13 February.

Brazil: Host of the 9th WCC assembly

Marked by its contrasts, Brazil is the largest Latin American nation and the fifth largest land mass in the world. Its 8.54 million

square kilometres are inhabited by 170 million people.

Its gorgeous Atlantic Ocean beaches are world famous. However, its geography is marked by enormous diversity—arid deserts, plains and savannahs, marshlands, mountain ranges as well as jungle and forest areas, many threatened by illegal land clearing.

Huge cities like Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (16 and 14 million inhabitants respectively) coexist alongside regions that have an extremely low demographic density. Diversity is also a characteristic of Brazil's population, originating from more than 40 ethnic groups and mixed with native indigenous peoples.

Throughout most of the 20th century until the 1970s, Brazil enjoyed its status as a so-called 'country of the future'. Its incalculable natural wealth helped justify this image, including the fact that 60 per cent of the Amazon jungle and 20 per cent of the planet's potable water reserves lie within its borders.

With 800 million hectares of farm land, the country has yet to carry out an agrarian reform. Many of the farmers expelled from the countryside live in misery in the cities. Others struggle to transform this reality. The Landless Workers Movement is one of the largest of its kind in the world.

The Brazilian ecumenical movement sought to draw closer to the people through solidarity and gained strength in the 1970s during its resistance to the military dictatorship. In 1982 the National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC) was created. It brings together the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), the Anglican Episcopal, Reformed, Methodist, United Presbyterian, Syrian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

It was the CONIC that invited the World Council of Churches to hold its 9th Assem-

bly in Porto Alegre, the cradle of the World Social Forum.

During those 10 days approximately 3,000 Christians from around the world will have the opportunity to experience the rich diversity of a fascinating country and its people who, despite enormous difficulties, struggle and celebrate life with unwavering hope—an attitude well known to those who, despite everything, persist in their commitment to a vision of Christian unity.

Assembly on the web

By visiting <http://www.wcc-assembly.info/>, you can be part of the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil—an event that will bring thousands of Christian women and men from around the world together for ecumenical encounter, prayer, celebration and deliberation.

The five-language website offers a comprehensive overview of what will happen in Porto Alegre, including:

- the assembly theme,
- the issues and concerns that the church representatives will discuss, such as economic justice, religious plurality, violence, and church unity,
- the prayers and Bible studies that will be part of their life together in Porto Alegre,
- news, feature articles and photos on the event, the theme and, in relation to that, 'stories of transformation' from the churches,
- the program, preparations and documents.

You can follow the life and work of the Assembly as it happens via the online news coverage, video summaries and live webcasts of the plenary sessions, access to important documents, and an e-news service open to the public from the website.

The Armenian Apostolic Church in Australia

New CCA member has history of 1,700 years of Christianity and beyond

Christianity has been a dominant force in Armenian culture for much of the country's modern history. It was introduced to Armenia by the Apostles St Thaddeus and St Bartholomew in the middle of the first century, hence the apostolic origin of the Armenian Church. Christianity took very strong roots among the Armenian people during the first three centuries, and the transition to a Christian state was a relatively smooth one, culminating in the year 301 AD. During the reign of King Dertades, Armenia became the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion at the hands of St Gregory the Illuminator. The Cathedral of Etchmiadzin 'the Mother See of the Armenian Church' was the first church to be built in Armenia in 303 AD. It remains the spiritual centre of the Armenian people and the residence of the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians until today.

The conversion of Armenia inevitably aroused the mistrust of its non-Christian neighbours. Notable among these was Zoroastrian Persia and a major battle was fought for the defence of Christianity in Armenia between the two countries in 451 AD.

The effects of Christendom were cultural too. It was through the relentless efforts of the church that the Armenian alphabet was invented by a learned celibate priest, St Mesrob Mashdotz, in 405 AD. The period immediately following the invention of the alphabet is recognised as the 'Golden Age' of Armenian classical literature as the Bible and major known works of philosophy were translated into Armenian in a very short space of time.



Armenians tenaciously held on to their Christian faith regardless of the repeated onslaughts of the various powers that swept through their lands throughout the centuries in search of religious and territorial conquests.

Despite seventy years of Soviet communism the church has been able to stay alive and successfully rejuvenated itself after the break up of the former Soviet Union. The numbers of churchgoers once again swelled to their former robust proportions. In a combined effort of the church and the government, Armenia commemorated the anniversary of 1700 years of Christianity in 2001 with great pageantry and with the participation of other Christian churches and diasporan communities.

The Armenian Apostolic Church in Australia

Armenian church life had humble beginnings in Australia in the early 1950s. The dedication and devotion of Armenians to their religion was so great that community members freely provided their homes and

property at the disposal of the community to rekindle church life that was synonymous with the Armenian national character. Bishops and priests were regularly invited from overseas to Australia to provide the small Armenian community with spiritual guidance and moral support.

Three church councils were formed in Australia, well before the establishment of local parishes. The first church council was founded in Sydney in 1953. The Melbourne Church Council was established in 1955. With a growing number of Armenians settling in the western suburbs of Sydney in the late to mid 1980s, a third church council was formed in Fairfield in 1993.

The Armenian Apostolic Church of Holy Resurrection, located on Campbell Street, Surry Hills, was the first Armenian Church to be consecrated in Australia in 1957. St Mary's Armenian Church was later consecrated in 1962 in the Melbourne suburb of North Fitzroy. As community numbers began to swell, both churches were subsequently relocated to larger premises with enhanced facilities.

Today, regular weekly liturgical services take place in these churches with monthly services held for the parish of Western Sydney. In addition, church services are conducted for mission parishes of Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, and in Auckland and Wellington in Aotearoa New Zealand on occasion throughout the year.

The Armenian Apostolic Church in NSW

Consecrated in 1957, the Armenian Apostolic Church of Holy Resurrection was frequented

by a small but vibrant group of Armenian migrants, who often travelled long distances to congregate at services in the small Armenian church located in Sydney's inner suburb of Surry Hills. Nine years later, in 1966, the church was relocated to 10 Macquarie Street, Chatswood, in the Municipality of Willoughby, where Armenian settlement started taking its roots.

The first Armenian clergyman, the late Very Reverend Father Asoghig Ghazarian, arrived in Australia in 1954.

In 1968 the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand was established with the diocesan centre located in Sydney.

In 1975 the Very Reverend Father Aghan Baliozian arrived in Sydney. He was appointed Primate of the Diocese in 1981. In 1982 he was consecrated Bishop at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and in 1993 was elevated to the rank of Archbishop. He is a member of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and is the Pontifical Legate of the Far East.

Over the history of the Armenian Church in NSW, Armenian clergy have contributed to spiritual life and to the ecumenical movement in Australia. His Eminence Archbishop Aghan Baliozian was elected the inaugural President of the National Council of Churches in Australia and served in this capacity from 1994 to 1997. He also represents the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin at the World Council of Churches.

The Armenian Apostolic Church became a member church of the National Council of Churches in Australia (previously known as the Australian Council of Churches) in 1960. Presently, the church holds membership with various state councils including the NSW Ecumenical Council, where Archbishop Aghan Baliozian currently serves as President, the Victorian Council of Churches, the Western Australian Council of Churches and Queensland Churches Together. In 2005, the Armenian Apostolic Church was granted membership status to the Christian Conference of Asia.

The Armenian Church has been more than a sanctuary for spiritual growth for the Armenian community of NSW. It has signified



The Cathedral of Etchmiadzin, the spiritual centre of the Armenian people

the legacy of a rich Armenian culture and a symbol of national identity and language. In an endeavour to preserve and maintain its cultural treasures for future generations of Australian-Armenians, the Armenian Church founded the first Armenian Saturday school in 1962 on the church premises.

The mission work of the Armenian Church included the provision of safe passage and settlement assistance for new migrants. In the early sixties, the church supported the migration of Armenians from all over the world and in particular, Armenians from Egypt.

Generally speaking, newly arrived Armenian migrants were assisted with settlement needs by clergy and parishioners who had arrived in Australia only a short time before them. It was not until 1982 that the Armenian community would have its first community officer to help with settlement and related welfare issues. This service, aided by the Australian Council of Churches, supported small emerging communities like the Armenian community, by providing a part-time worker. The Armenian Community Welfare Centre was officially established in 1982 under the auspice of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Australia and New Zealand.

While the initial aim of the centre was to assist newly arrived Armenian migrants in their quest to settle in the adopted country, it has since expanded its programs and activities to better meet the changing needs of the community. With an ageing community the centre caters primarily for the aged and frail by provision of aged day care services, dementia and respite care, a home visiting program and a monthly outings program. The centre also operates as an information and referral source to ensure that all members of the Armenian community can equitably access mainstream social and community services.

The Armenian Apostolic Church in NSW is an active parish. Its parishioners are exceptionally loyal and devoted to maintaining the rich traditions and cultural heritage that is the Armenian legacy.

For the growing needs of its community, the church has developed programs over the years of religious, cultural and social significance. These include prayer groups, Bible study groups, Sunday school classes, religious education classes in mainstream schools, church choir, church bulletin ('Looyce' monthly magazine), community radio, youth groups, senior citizen groups, adult English program and so on.

Peace to none else

Mammen Varkey writes of the peace that is the assurance and hope of Christmas

This is the Christmas season. The air resonates with the melodious angelic hymn, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours'. The heavenly host sang it to a bunch of poor shepherds who were 'living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night'. (Luke 2:8). The joyful chorus had followed an unbelievable announcement to the terribly amazed shepherds, '... *to you* is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

Many Biblical scholars would *prefer* to consider Luke's narrative of the birth of Jesus as a beautiful piece of 'folk poetry' *rather than* as a historically precise account of the birth. What is most significant is that Luke chose to make it part of his gospel, which was written as 'an orderly account' for Theophilus so that he might 'know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed'. (Luke 1:3, 4). And also that the early church diligently preserved it. Profoundly meaningful this narrative is, then, for a proper understanding of Jesus, his person and his mission.

The angels sang, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours.' In fact, the chorus of the 'multitude of the heavenly host' was not simply a rapturous praising of God but a reiteration of the state of the future that would be ushered in as a result of the coming of Christ, the Lord.

Peace, in Hebrew, is *shalom*, which may be paraphrased as 'salvation'. The fact that the assurance of peace, the promise of salvation, was first announced to shepherds who were out in the field watching their sheep, has a special significance. It is common knowl-

edge that they were not very 'religious'. It was not possible for them to observe all the laws and to adhere to all ceremonial prescriptions. So they were despised people.

Attempts have been made to give a special status to these shepherds. It has been suggested that they were a special lot of shepherds who were in charge of lambs for sacrifice in the temple. They might be responsible for the supply of unblemished lambs for temple offering but there is no adequate reason to elevate them to a special category of shepherds. They were yet another band of simple people who were willing to tune their ears to new voices, to open their hearts to new possibilities, to venture out risking their 'sheep' and possessions, and to commit to new journeys braving all the odds. Only to them will the 'good news of great joy for all the people' be entrusted. Obdurate observance of laws and rituals, and insanely intolerant attitudes to others do not, obviously, make one deserving to receive the message of peace. Christmas reminds us that only those who are willing to share the good tidings of great joy *to all the people* and *to go out risking their possessions* will have the privilege of being entrusted with the message of peace.

Why to shepherds first?

The shepherds were given a message about those with whom God is pleased. So, indirectly, those shepherds themselves were a group of human beings who were pleasing to God. Because, is it reasonable to think that a message regarding those 'with whom he is pleased' would be delivered to a set with whom God is not at all pleased?

So there must have been some qualities and characteristics that made them worthy to be the chosen audience for the heavenly choir and to receive first the announcement about

the birth of the 'Saviour who is Christ the Lord'.

Not to one particular person

Incidentally, it is critically important that the news was brought first not to one person but to a community of persons, not to individuals who could be called by names but to a group of simple folks who were not known by their individual names.

They would not make him a private property

The shepherds had absolutely no difficulty in receiving the news, which would bring great joy to all the people. The angel was clear that this news of great joy to all the people should not be appropriated by a few. The shepherds, having found the baby, it was certain, would not appropriate him, would not steal him away. Had the news been first delivered to the chief priests and chieftains of religions they would have—as has happened all through history and repeated even now—would have appropriated him and would have staked proprietary claims over the baby! The child would not have been available for all the people. But the shepherds simply went back, glorifying and praising God, leaving behind the baby in the manger!

Not bound by possessions

It is important to note that the flocks of sheep did not hold the shepherds back. When the angels went away, the shepherds hurried off to Bethlehem. (Luke 2:15, 16) Darkness did not frighten them and the treacherous terrain of Bethlehem did not stop them. They went with 'haste'. The angel was sure the shepherds would race to the manger in Bethlehem before the baby was shifted from there. The 'wise men' could see the baby only in the house! (Matthew 2:10) The wise

men, the academics, the devout and the chief priests would have preferred to start on the journey after a detailed analysis and investigation, after fulfilling all religious formalities and making all arrangements for the safe custody of their 'sheep' and completing all the preparations for a safe and comfortable pilgrim trip. By that time the baby would have been transferred!

Beyond academic wisdom

The shepherds were asked to find the baby nowhere else than in a manger. The 'wise men', from their knowledge of movements of the celestial bodies and their extraordinary wisdom found out that the king of the Jews was born. Then what did they do? They went straight to Jerusalem! The academics, the scholars and the 'wise' would search for the Saviour, if the arrival was announced to them, first in 'palaces'! The academic scholarship would not permit them to go beyond 'reigning' knowledge and conventional wisdom. They would have to crash open intellectual fortresses and cross over, to see the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger. As for 'shepherds', it would be only natural to search for the Saviour in a manger! If the Saviour was born in a manger, only 'shepherds' could effortlessly, spontaneously reach there. The wise and the scholarly would have to break open their authoritative wisdom and reasoning to reach 'Bethlehem' and see the 'babe'!

Refugees in their own city

Mary and Joseph were a pair of 'refugees' in Bethlehem, though they, originally, belonged to that city. They had no place to lie down in their native place, not even a small place to lay their child. They were like the Palestinians of today. Refugees in their home town! These refugees were met by shepherds who shared with the former what they had been told concerning the child. All 'who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them'. (Luke 2:18) Refugees were met by 'despised workers'. There was perfect communication. A community of people mutually understanding and appreciating. Peace was the result. That 'the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had

heard and seen' (Luke 2:20) reveals that they were happy in their journey 'with haste' to Bethlehem. Abiding peace can result only from the 'meeting' of ordinary people. Peace brokered by rulers cannot be lasting.

With whom is he pleased?

Peace is assured only to those with whom he is pleased. Naturally the question arises with whom God is pleased. In Jesus' life, at least on two occasions, it is recorded, God was pleased with him. The first was at the time of his baptism, and the second, on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Why did Jesus take baptism?

Why Jesus should have taken baptism has always been a question baffling the believers. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. As an absolutely sinless person Jesus need not have taken baptism. In fact, John was unwilling, in the first instance, to baptise Jesus.

'John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?"' (Matthew 3:14) But on hearing Jesus' answer, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness,' (Matthew 3:15) John consented. So the baptism of Jesus was not act of repentance but an unquestionable expression of his commitment that he made to the call of John, the Baptist, for establishing 'the kingdom of heaven'. (Matthew 3:2)

Transformation is inevitable

The 'kingdom of heaven' is rooted in righteousness, justice. And 'peace' can be fully realised only in a society of righteousness, justice.

Transformation is the inevitable outcome of authentic repentance, transformation of individuals and structures. Any attempt to establish abiding peace in an unrepentant society, in a society unwilling to be transformed, is sure to collapse. Again, Jesus' baptism was the clearest act of his total identification with the ordinary people. So God is pleased with those who commit themselves to contribute to the establishment of the 'kingdom of heaven' and in the process to identify themselves with people in repentance.

Prior to the Mount of Transfiguration

On the Mount of Transfiguration it was also told that God was pleased with Jesus. 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5) What was the compulsion for making such a heavenly announcement? Just prior to going up to the mountain, Jesus was happy that Peter had discovered him as the Christ. And, as the Christ, Jesus, opted for the 'rejection' by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, fully committed himself to the path of the cross and offered himself to be killed. It was to this total submission to the will of God that the heaven responded. It was his unshakeable resolve to take up the cross and be crucified that the heaven attested with the words, 'I am well pleased.'

It is, then, absolutely clear that God is pleased with all those who are willing to bear the cross and to be killed in the efforts for the establishment of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of justice.



Peace is the gift of God for those who uncompromisingly oppose powers of evil and structures of injustice. Peace is God's reward for taking up the cross. Peace is costly.

Peace is God's promise to those with whom he is pleased. And he, be it noted, is pleased only with those who have taken the baptism, committing themselves totally to the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness and those who are on the road to Gethsemane.

This peace is the assurance and hope of Christmas.

FABC

Archbishop Orlando Beltran Quevedo of Cotabato, Philippines, was elected secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences at its central committee meeting held 18–19 November in Thailand. He succeeds Archbishop Oswald Gomis of Colombo. Archbishop Quevedo was born in 1939 in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, in the northernmost part of the Philippines. In June 1964 he was ordained a priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He became a bishop in 1980 and an archbishop in 1986. He has been archbishop of Cotabato since May 1998. The archbishop has had a long affiliation with the FABC and was responsible in writing the final document of the last general assembly held in Korea in 1994 on 'Family'. The general secretary is the highest position in the FABC, which does not have a president.

Fr Raymond O'Toole of the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society was elected the new assistant general secretary of the FABC. Fr O'Toole was a leadership member of his community in Canada and coordinator of the Scarboro Mission's Interfaith Desk. He has worked as a missionary in Brazil and Hong Kong, where he is based at the moment.

He succeeds Fr Edmund Malone, who was FABC's assistant secretary general from its inception in 1970.

The general secretariat of the FABC is based in Hong Kong where it is also legally established.

SIGNIS

Augy Lorthusamy of Malaysia was elected the new president of SIGNIS at its World Congress held in Lyon, France. Augy is a former regional secretary of the Asia Region of the World Association for Christian Communication. SIGNIS is a non-governmental organisation with members in 140 countries. As the world Catholic Association for Communication, it brings together radio, television, cinema, video, media education, the internet and new technology professionals.

CCA interns

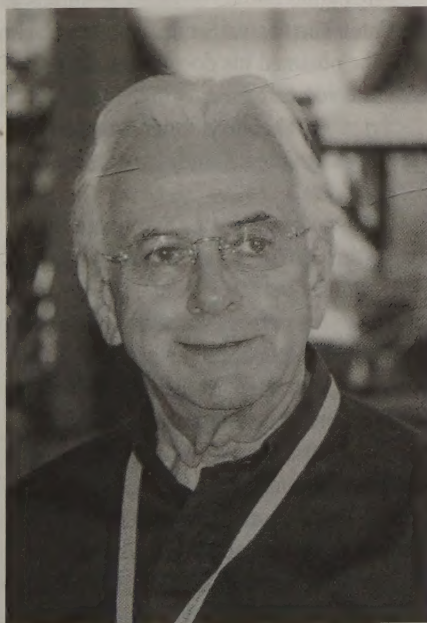
Two new youth interns have joined the CCA. Ms Lo Chia-Fang, 27, is a member of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT). She has a bachelor of arts degree in foreign languages from the Presbyterian Bible College.

Chia-Fang attended the 12th general assembly of CCA held in Chiang Mai as a steward. She was also a youth delegate of PCT's Ecumenical Youth Exchange Program in 2005. Watching movies is one of her hobbies. She wishes to learn more about ecumenism.

Ms La Wun Shwe Wut Ye, 25, is a member of the Methodist church from Myanmar. A graduate from the Myanmar Institute of Theology, she attended the WCC central committee meeting held in Geneva in 2005 as a steward. She likes swimming. She hopes to gain lot of experience during her CCA internship and return home with new ideas.

Korea

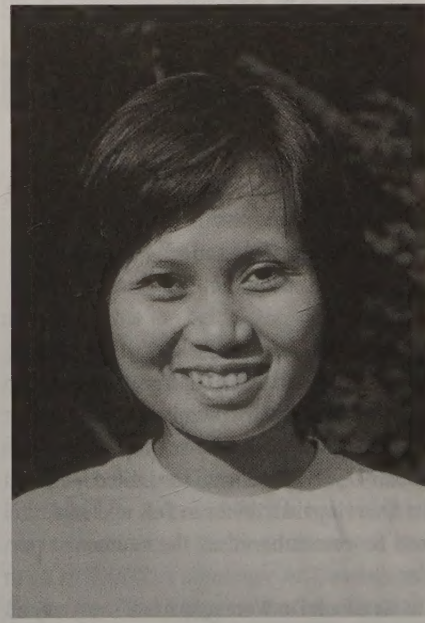
Dr Ahn Jae Woong, former general secretary of CCA, has been appointed as Distinguished Professor of the United Graduate School of Theology at Hoseo University in Cheonan city, near Seoul, Korea. He will offer courses for graduate students in Asian church history and Asian church and mission. He will teach ecumenism and gospel and culture to international students. Ahn will also write a column on the ecumenical movement for a leading monthly magazine, *Christian Thoughts*.



Raymond O'Toole



Lo Chia-Fang



La Wun Shwe Wut

Tributes to Feliciano Cariño

Former CCA general secretary passes away

Dr Feliciano Cariño, former general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, passed away on 17 November in Hong Kong. He was 70.

Dr Cariño, Fely to many of his friends, was the general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines from 1988 to 1995.

Dr Prawate Khid-arn, general secretary of CCA, said that Fely was a man with great intellect and an ability to articulate his case. 'He will be greatly missed in the Asian ecumenical scene,' he added.

Expressing condolences, Dr Ahn Jae Woong, who succeeded Fely as general secretary of CCA, in a message from Seoul, described Fely as an effective ecumenical leader who had many friends in the ecumenical movement. It has lost a great leader, he noted.

Dr Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, said that Fely's speeches at Maramon Conventions were sound theological and evangelical discourses. 'He was ecumenical in thinking, doing and living.'

Bishop George Ninan, a former associate general secretary of CCA recalled his friendship with Fely and said that he made important contributions to the ecumenical movement.

Mr Lakshman Gunasekara, a Sri Lankan journalist, noted that he had great respect for Fely for his 'steady commitment and amply demonstrated spiritual discipline'.

Mr Levi Bautista from the United Methodist Church paid tributes to Fely and said, 'he will be remembered as the ecumenist par excellence'.

Rev. Paik Do Woong, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, in a letter of condolence said that Fely was a



fine leader and a good friend of the Korean churches.

Dr M.J. Joseph, director of the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore, India, described him as a 'scholar, writer and a pilgrim in the Asian ecumenical scenario'. As general secretary of CCA, he gave bold leadership for the Congress of Asian Theologians, he said.

'A great loss to the global ecumenical movement,' was the reaction of Mr Charlie Ocampo of the Sydney-based Church World Service.

Dr Park Kyung-seo, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights in Korea, said that Fely's vision for the poor and voiceless are a model for Asian ecumenical leaders.

Rev. Prof. James Haire, president of the National Council of Churches in Australia, in a letter of condolence said that Dr Cariño was 'primarily respected in this country as a clear and articulate Christian leader who was able to express Christianity in the Asian context, in situations of fear and hope, conflict and challenge'.

Rev Yoon Kil-Soo, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, mourned 'the loss of this brother in Christ, so deeply loved and highly respected

for his clear witness to the transforming love of Christ and strong leadership contribution to the ecumenical movement'.

Fely began his ecumenical work as a study secretary of the Student Christian Movement of the Philippines in 1957.

From 1973 to 1977, Fely served as the general secretary of the World Student Christian Federation in Geneva. He taught Christian ethics and philosophy at the Philippine Christian University in Manila and other institutions in the country. He was also the dean of the university from 1979 to 1986.

Dr Cariño wrote more than 50 academic papers and gave presentations at many national and international meetings. He also edited ecumenical journals and publications and served on the board of several church-related institutions.

He was a member of the general committee of CCA from 1990 to 1995.

Fely Cariño did his theological studies at the Union Theological Seminary in Manila. In 1975 he obtained his doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary in the USA for his dissertation 'Theology, modernisation and ideological politics: A study in contemporary Asian politics'.

In 1996 he was elected the general secretary of the CCA for a period of five years.

One of the last CCA programs he attended, as a resource person, was the general committee meeting held in September this year in Chiang Mai. He was also present at the 12th general assembly of CCA held a few months prior.

Mourners in Hong Kong attended a memorial service organised by CCA on 24 November at the Kowloon Union Church.

Fely is survived by his wife Theresa and their daughter Monica, a son-in-law and a granddaughter.

—Philip Matbiew

Church of North India

The 12th Ordinary Synod of the Church of North India was held in October 2005 at Bishop Westcott Boys School, Namkum, Ranchi. The theme of the synod was 'Towards Transformed and Transforming Community'. The bishops, presbyters and lay representatives at the synod issued the following statement:

We recognise that we live in a world where Satan's Throne is (Revelation 2:13), where there is poverty, disparity, disunity, communal self-interest leading to violence, continued oppression and exploitation of woman, children (especially girls) and subalterns (dalits, tribals, indigenous people and the marginalised) are deprived of their rights and resources by dominant communities, where senior citizens are looked down on as a burden and are abandoned to live in isolation, where persons with disabilities are excluded from mainstream activities, where youth are becoming introverted and individualistic, demand freedom of choice and who indulge in activities that are drifting them away from the kingdom of God, and where the environment is becoming polluted causing imbalance to the creation of God. Therefore we urge:

- all people in general and particularly members of our church to be worshipping, sharing, serving and truly Eucharistic community rooted in Jesus Christ, who is the author and energiser of transformation in all dimensions, i.e. religious, social, economical and cultural, as well as identified with the whole creation of God. The church needs to be inclusivist, keeping in view the intention of God (John 3:16), and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all—irrespective of class, colour or creed through interfaith dialogue and by loving others as our neighbours,
- one and all to stand by those who are victims of poverty, injustice and oppression—upholding their rights to human dignity and equality,

- its diocesan councils and pastorates to commit themselves to provide spiritual nurture and protect children and youth, irrespective of gender, from all forms of injustice and exploitation and cater to their holistic needs and give them adequate representation as well as to involve them in decision-making process,
- people to give dignity, rights and well-being for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, and in order to bring transformation, to conscientise and help subalterns: dalits in general, particularly dalit Christians, indigenous people, the marginalised and oppressed in any manner to break the culture of silence and affirm solidarity for the cause of restoring their rights and resources,
- believers/Christians to encourage the practice of individual and family prayers, Bible study and corporate worship in the church. It is pertinent at this time to reread scripture and redefine spirituality to empower and involve women in all decision-making processes at all levels for community transformation,
- everyone to be environmentally friendly and to take care of God's creation, which is also the headway towards a transformed and transforming community.

United Evangelical Lutheran Church

The 26th Triennial Conference of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, held in Jharkhand, concluded with a clarion call to the Indian Lutheran communion to be deeply engaged in responding to the challenges of poverty and development, HIV/AIDS, capacity building, gender justice and empowerment.

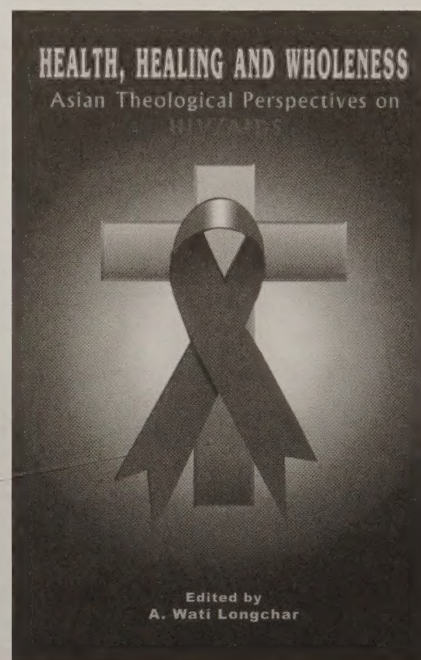
In response to a proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development (PEAD), the UELCI called for a more 'church based sensitivity' to protect the diaconal theology, challenges and responsibilities of the churches in the South. While it welcomed all forms of coordination for proper use of resources, it appealed for a greater role of the churches in the proposed

process. The NELC, a constituent member of the UELCI and IWF hosted this meeting. More than 120 delegates, visitors and guests participated. The GELC, another member church in the state of Jharkhand was a co-host.

New book

Health, Healing and Wholeness: Asian Theological Perspectives on HIV/AIDS

Edited by A. Wati Longchar



This book, edited by Wati Longchar, is a collection of thirteen articles written by scholars and church leaders.

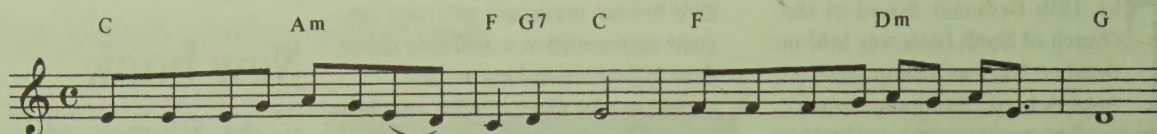
It unveils the Asian face of HIV/AIDS and highlights the economic, political and gender basis of the HIV/AIDS and the moral, ethical and theological debate about it and redefines the role that Christians and the church should play now for the future. This is the second book Ecumenical Theological Education for Asia and Pacific has brought out in recent times. The first volume was entitled *HIV/AIDS: A Challenge to Theological Education*. Wati Longchar can be contacted at ETE-WCC/CCA, c/o Eastern Theological College, Rajabari, Jorhat, Assam, India.

The music and lyrics of this song were composed by Wichitra Akraphichayatorn, a medical doctor who comes from a family of musicians, and who is now studying theology at the Bangkok Institute of Theology. She composed the song for the Thai national workshop on ecumenism and feminist theology, with encouragement from her feminist theology teacher, Nantiya Petchgate.

Fight for Women's Rights

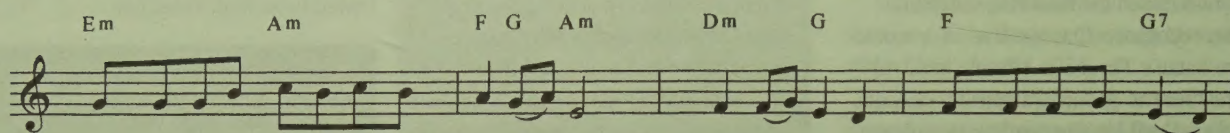
Music & Lyric by
Wichitra Akraphichayatorn

♩ = 80

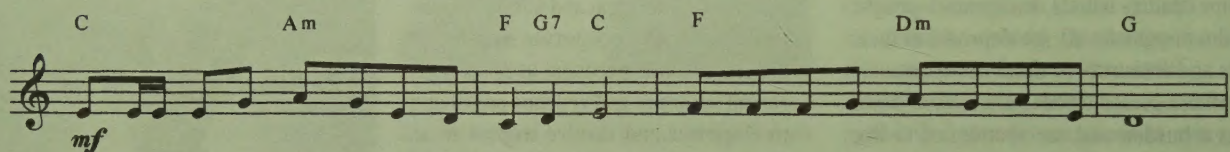


mp

Why are wo-men of this world so op-pressed? Why is there in-justice a-mong them?

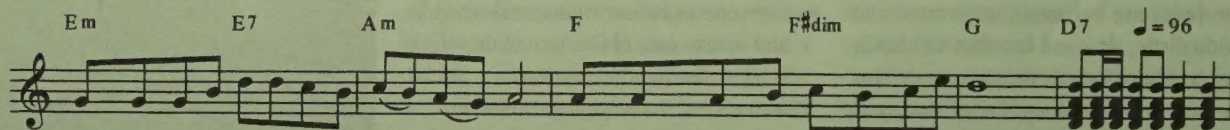


There are many hung-ry children in this world. Where is _ justice? Where are love and peace?



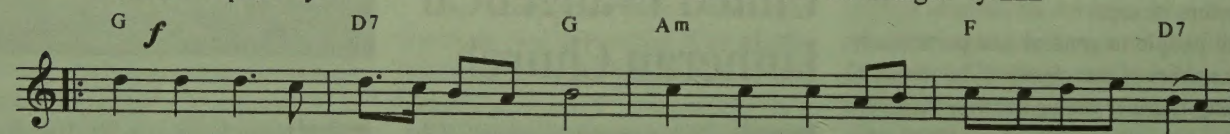
mf

God creat-ed this world for us to live in peace. Men and wo-men both are God's Im-age.

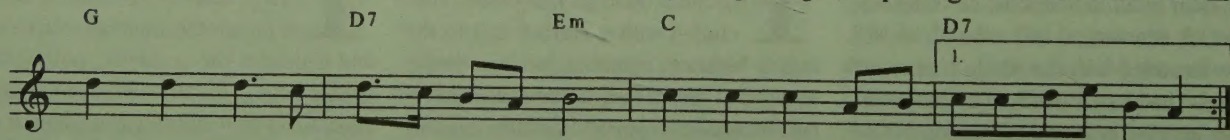


ff

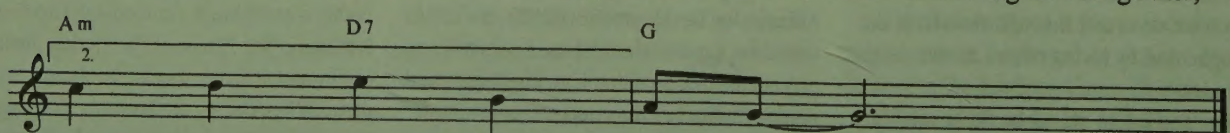
Will there be equali-ty for hu-man-kind? Give them chance to live with digni-ty. _



Fight, fight, fight, we'll fight for wo-men's rights. Right, right, right, equal rights for hu-man-kind.



Shout, shout, shout, for those who can not shout. Let's come out, share our lov-ing care to ge ther,



lov - ing care to - ge - ther. _